

Strengthening Governance and Authorizer Partnerships

Companion Handout Packet
MCCSA Webinar Series | May 2026

“Strong partnerships do not happen by accident — they are built through clarity, consistency, and shared purpose.”



AirWin Educational Services LLC
4521 Henry Drive Beaverton, MI 48612
989.239.7555
ANGELA@AIRWINLLC.COM

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HANDOUT 1

Understanding the Board–Authorizer Partnership

A Strong Partnership is Built on:

Clarity

- Understanding the distinct role of the authorizer
- Understanding the governance role of the board
- Understanding where management responsibilities begin and end
- Understanding expectations outlined within the charter contract

Consistency

- Reliable communication
- Timely reporting and responsiveness
- Consistent adherence to policy, law, and contractual obligations
- Predictable governance practices

Shared Purpose

- Student success
- School sustainability
- Organizational accountability
- Mission fulfillment

The Most Common Cause of Tension

Tension between boards and authorizers is rarely rooted in disagreement.

More often, tension results from

- Misunderstanding of roles
- Misunderstanding of expectations
- Misunderstanding of intent
- Delayed communication
- Lack of transparency during challenges

Partnership Reflection Questions

1. Does our board clearly understand the role of the authorizer?

2. Do we understand WHY our authorizer requests specific information?

3. What steps can we take to strengthen alignment and communication?

4. Are we building a relationship grounded in trust and transparency?

HANDOUT 2

Understanding the Authorizer's Role

The Authorizer Exists to:

1. Ensure Contractual Accountability

Authorizers monitor whether the school is fulfilling the commitments outlined within the charter contract.

2. Monitor Academic, Financial, and Operational Performance

Oversight includes reviewing student achievement, financial stability, governance effectiveness, and operational compliance.

3. Protect Students and Public Interest

Authorizers are responsible for ensuring public trust, educational quality, and legal compliance.

Michigan Charter School Oversight Language

“The oversight must be sufficient to ensure that the board of directors is in compliance with the terms of the contract and with applicable law.”

— Michigan Revised School Code, Part 6A, Section 380.507(7)(d)

Important Perspective Shift

Oversight is not intended to:

- Run the school
- Replace board leadership
- Control daily operations

Oversight **IS** intended to:

- Ensure accountability
- Monitor performance
- Support responsible governance
- Protect long-term school success

What Effective Boards Understand

Strong boards understand that:

- Oversight is part of the charter school model
- Accountability and autonomy work together
- Transparency strengthens trust
- Early communication prevents larger problems later

Reflection Prompt

How does your board currently view the authorizer relationship?

Primarily compliance-driven Primarily collaborative Mixed depending on the situation Unclear

What could strengthen the relationship?

HANDOUT 3

The Accountability Flow

Understanding How Accountability Moves Through the System

The Authorizer Oversees

The authorizer:

- Holds the charter contract
- Monitors performance and compliance
- Evaluates school outcomes
- Protects public interest

The Board Governs

The board:

- Sets vision and policy
- Provides strategic oversight
- Holds leadership accountable
- Ensures mission alignment

School Leadership Operates

Leadership:

- Implements strategy
- Manages daily operations
- Leads staff and programs
- Delivers organizational results

The Accountability Loop

Performance data and outcomes should continuously flow:

Leadership → Board → Authorizer

This creates:

- Continuous improvement
- Strategic decision-making
- Organizational alignment
- Shared accountability for student success

The Three Conditions That Keep the System Healthy

Trust

- Positive assumptions
- Professional credibility
- Follow-through on commitments

Transparency

- Early communication
- Honest reporting
- Timely disclosure of challenges

Respect for Roles

- Boards govern
- Leadership operates
- Authorizers oversee

Warning Signs the Accountability System is Breaking Down

Boards May:

- Drift into operations
- React instead of govern strategically
- Focus only on compliance

Leadership May:

- Operate without adequate accountability
- Delay communication of concerns
- Blur governance boundaries

Authorizers May:

- Become overly directive
- Lose confidence in governance effectiveness
- Increase monitoring intensity

Board Reflection Questions

1. Are we governing strategically or operating tactically?

2. Are we receiving enough information to fulfill our oversight role?

3. Are we communicating openly with our authorizer?

HANDOUT 4

Understanding the WHY Behind Authorizer Requests

Why Authorizers Request Information

When authorizers request reports, updates, or documentation, the purpose is typically connected to one or more of the following responsibilities:

Oversight Area	Why It Matters
Academic Performance	To monitor student achievement and school effectiveness
Financial Stability	To ensure long-term sustainability and fiscal responsibility
Legal & Contractual Compliance	To verify adherence to law, policy, and contract requirements
Organizational Capacity	To assess leadership, governance, and operational strength

Reframing the Conversation

Instead of asking:

“Why are they asking for this again?”

Strong boards begin asking:

“How does this help us demonstrate our effectiveness and sustainability?”

Best Practices for Board Responses

Be Proactive

- Anticipate reporting timelines
- Monitor internal dashboards regularly
- Address concerns early

Be Transparent

- Share challenges honestly
- Avoid surprises
- Communicate before issues escalate

Be Organized

- Maintain board records
- Track compliance deadlines
- Use dashboards and reporting systems

Be Strategic

- Focus on trends and outcomes
- Use data to drive governance discussions
- Connect oversight to student success

Discussion Prompt

Which authorizer requests does your board understand well?

Which requests create the most confusion or frustration?

How can your board shift toward a more strategic mindset?

HANDOUT 5

The Charter Contract: Your Shared Anchor

The Charter Contract Defines:

Expectations

- Academic expectations
- Financial expectations
- Governance expectations
- Operational expectations

Performance Standards

- Student achievement goals
- Compliance requirements
- Reporting obligations
- Accountability measures

Renewal Criteria

- Performance benchmarks
- Organizational sustainability
- Contract compliance

The Contract Should Guide:

Board Decision-Making

- Strategic priorities
- Goal setting
- Oversight focus

Authorizer Communication

- Reporting expectations
- Compliance monitoring
- Accountability conversations

Organizational Alignment

- Mission implementation
- School improvement planning
- Long-term sustainability

Strong Governance Practice

When uncertainty arises, strong boards return to:

- The charter contract
- Board policy
- Performance goals
- Agreed-upon accountability measures

Board Reflection Questions

1. How familiar is our board with the charter contract?

Very Familiar Somewhat Familiar Minimally Familiar Needs Significant Review

2. Does the board regularly connect discussions back to contract expectations?

3. Are our goals and dashboards aligned to contract expectations?

HANDOUT 6

Governance and Authorizer Alignment Self-Assessment

Rate Your Board's Current Practice

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Our board understands the role of the authorizer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our board communicates proactively with the authorizer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our board understands the WHY behind oversight requests	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We maintain clear governance and operations boundaries	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We use data strategically during board discussions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We address concerns early and transparently	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our board regularly references the charter contract	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We view the authorizer relationship as a partnership	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Areas of Strength

Areas for Growth

One Action Step Our Board Can Take Immediately
